

Last week's election in Texas had a Constitutional Amendment providing for a State Ethics Commission to watch over the politicians and to set their pay scale. Voters were in a sour humor. An overwhelming majority indicated they didn't want another commission for the lobbyists to support. Now did they wish to take the chance that the worthies in Austin would find themselves in a higher income tax bracket.

I wanted to see what would happen. Ethics would have been a strange process to introduce in the state government. It would have been sort of like the state's kennel clubs trying to get their dogs to change their attitude toward fireplugs.

Watching the commission guide the standards of our leaders would have been worthwhile. I'd already guessed that the police alone would have been larger than anything New York could field for a hot summer night's riot. But the voters ended that speculation. Shortgrass Indian leaders tried putting their councils under a code of ethics at one time. Redmen copied their plan from the Medicine Men's Assn. (The M.M.A.) Medicine men, you see, were a self-regulated profession. They were so careful to remain apart from witch doctors that they wouldn't even treat a witch unless she slipped by their office force. Medicine men were outright scornful of the witch doctors.

Indian doctors had an oath to go by, and I mean to tell you they had to follow it. For instance, if a doctor was caught using the word "wampum" instead of "fee," he could lose his credentials faster than squaw could skin a buffalo's tongue. Let one of them mention money in front of a patient and he'd find himself herding horses for a living.

Anyhow, the M.M.A. had so much contact with the tribal councils that the idea of ethics sort of rubbed off on both parties. So they got together and passed a bunch of very strict standards. Tax exemptions for witch doctors were ended. Midwives were denied citizenship. Manufacturer of charms was declared illegal, and delivering a papoose without a license was punishable by exile to the mountains over in what later became Mexico.

Tribal legislators were also restricted in their activities. For example, any chief caught accepting a bribe was automatically condemned to one hour solitary confinement in his teepee. Leaders apprehended misusing public funds were denied the privilege of sending smoke signals free for two moons.

Granting special favors to private businesses wasn't so serious an offense, yet two or three incidents were a sure bet to cause a lot of criticism from the floor of the house.

Medicine men were regulated right along with other dignitaries. Doctors were forced to file an intent to pay taxes every fourth moon. (Don't let this moon business confuse you. Moon to an Indian is the same as month is to us, except they were too smart to have anything as complicated as a leap year month.) Licenses had to be issued by the approval of whatever doctor was serving as a councilman. Doctor's offices were exempt from taxation; nevertheless, no public funds were openly used to support their research.

Braves failed to support the ethic plan. The codes and laws were never actually tested, unless you want to count the 100 or so cases that were brought against the witch doctors and the midwives. One councilman was embarrassed by getting caught with a quiver full of wampum that had supposedly come from a dancing school that was wanting tribal financial aid. His case, however, was strangely lost in the dockets. Some of his neighbors did get nasty about his wife being put on the board of regents later on when the school finally became a government supported institution.

I am disappointed that the State of Texas isn't going to have an Ethics board. For the past year, the press has been going around telling a lot of our state officials' secrets. A board appointed by the politicians and manned by politicians would be more discreet in what they made public. Staffed by men who know the game, the Board would eliminate a large amount of image rebuilding every time an officer of the state is accused of making 50 or 60 thousand dollars extra on a couple of sessions of hard work. Public relations expense is a terrific burden under the present circumstances. Whitewashing jobs are bound to be more costly as the demand grows every year.

Just because the Indians couldn't make it work doesn't mean that we can't. We won't ever have good government until we have someone to tell our statesmen what good conduct is.